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ABSTRACT

Interviews, questionnaires, school visits, and examination of project films and documents supplied information for an interim evaluation of the effectiveness of the Roctapus (Really Outstanding Color Television About Practically Unlimited Subjects) program. A closed-circuit television series following a magazine format, Roctapus is distributed to 12,000 students in over 80 schools in the Priority Country Area and intended to enrich the experiential background of country children in grades 4-10. Reactions of staff and students were obtained in 56 schools, 81% of the total number participating. In primary schools over 90% of the viewing took place during regular classroom lessons; teacher opinion was overwhelmingly positive. Only one-fourth of the secondary schools regularly showed Roctapus programs; in about half the schools students had--and chose--the option of viewing programs during the lunch hour. In general, high school teachers considered the programs of limited value, chiefly because they were unable to relate program content to subject areas. Student response at all grade levels was positive. The high level of acceptance achieved in primary and, to a lesser extent, in secondary departments suggests that the program is achieving its intended purposes. Further evaluation should include detailed analysis of program content, of staff and student reaction to individual program segments, and of the quality of instruction based on program content. (JH)

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PRIORITY COUNTRY AREA PROGRAM EVALUATION SERIES

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PRIORITY COUNTRY AREA PROGRAM EVALUATION SERIES: REPORT NO. 3

The Roctapus Closed-Circuit Television Program

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May 1979

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INTRODUCTION

This interim report has been prepared in response to the Joint Committee's expressed need for information about the Roctapus series of T.V. programs. It presents the current findings of a five-week old evaluation study, commenced after the Committee's last meeting on 10 April 1979.

Because of the limited time available a form of presentation has been chosen which makes maximum use of a range of materials already available. Thus background information about Roctapus is supplied by the Project Profile in Appendix I. It is also intended that the written contents of the report should be supplemented by the viewing of selected clips from Roctapus tapes.

Finally, constraints of time and space severely limited the amount of information which could be presented at this stage. Consequently, the report attempts to concentrate on those findings judged likely to be of most use to the Committee in its present deliberations. To this end, the principal arguments for and against the program have been summarised in sections entitled an Advocate's Statement and an Adversary's Statement; 'skimming the cream' would appear to be the appropriate metaphor.

PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The request for an evaluation of Roctapus arose from the Committee discussions concerning budget priorities for the next financial year. The immediate purpose of the evaluation and of this interim report was, therefore, to supply information which might help the Committee in deciding the level of funding to the Roctapus program in 1979/80.

In the longer term, it is intended that the evaluation will supply more conclusive evidence concerning the value of the Roctapus program as a contribution to the education of country children. It is also intended that it should supply a feedback to the Roctapus Team of information likely to be of assistance in the further development of the program.

The final report will, it is hoped, be of use not only to the Joint Committee of the Priority Country Area Program (hereafter P.C.A.P.) but also to the wider audience of all those interested in the education of country children.

THE EVALUATION APPROACH

In planning an approach to evaluating the Roctapus program the principal concern was to produce a design compatible with the purposes outlined above. This resulted in an evaluation plan which incorporates:

- a concern for program content as well as program intent ;
- an emphasis on process as well as product;
- a consideration of both intended and unintended outcomes;
- the collection of information from a variety of sources, using a variety of methods; and
- provision for directing responses to audience requirements for information.

The overall evaluation approach is characterised by an emphasis on description and interpretation rather than on quantification and measurement.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Information for this report was obtained in the following ways:

- from surveys conducted by the Roctapus team during 1978;
- from a telephone survey of schools which did not respond to the above surveys;
- from visits to schools in the priority country areas and discussions with staff and students;
- through interviews with teachers from priority country area schools which used the program during 1978;
- by analysis of the documentation at the Roctapus office and the P.C.A.P. secretariat in Brisbane;
- from interviews with members of the Roctapus team and other Film Centre staff;
- by studying a selection of the Roctapus tapes; and
- from interviews with Departmental and P.C.A.P. administrative staff in the Priority Country area.

Despite the apparent extent of these investigations, readers of this interim report should be aware that there has been little time, as yet, for any in-depth or detailed research into the different aspects of the Roctapus program. There has, for instance, been no detailed analysis of program content, of staff and student reaction to individual programs or segments of programs, or the quality of integrated work, all of which could be seen as desirable components of a comprehensive evaluation. It is important that the findings presented in later sections of this report be interpreted with these reservations in mind.

As the evaluation proceeds it is intended that the acceptability of subjective data will be continually improved through the comparison of findings obtained by one method with evidence from alternative sources or instruments. Also, as a check on the accuracy of the interpretation of descriptive material, relevant sections of the draft for the final report will be discussed with the principal informants.

THE PURPOSES OF ROCTAPUS

A statement of the purposes of the Roctapus program, prepared by members of the production team, is presented as Appendix II of this report.

From a study of this statement, various Roctapus handouts and other documentation, as well as discussion with members of the Roctapus team, it appears that the following summary would include the principal purposes of the Roctapus program:

- It endeavours to discriminate positively, and help students facing situations less favourable to learning.
- It strives to be educational, but intrinsically interesting and exciting to the viewers, and does not rely on specific relationships with the school syllabus to capture an audience.
- It seeks ways of widening the horizons of children who through isolation are limited in the kind of contact and experience available to children in larger centres.
- It attempts to break a pattern of resource provisions for rural areas which simply replicate responses to urban school needs. In doing this it endeavours to recognise the unique experience and knowledge of country children.
- It tries to involve directly the students of schools in the Priority Country Areas, where much of the program material is collected, and to respond to the stated needs of those children.
- For teachers, it seeks to offer a miscellany of incidental teaching resource material.

Having identified some of the principal aims of the program, a brief consideration of their suitability will not be out of place. Firstly, the purposes of Roctapus could be clearly seen as attempting to answer at least two of the questions relating to educational disadvantage posed in the P.C.A.P. Annual Report for 1977:

> *" – How can the experiential background of country children be enriched?*
> *– How can teachers be assisted in developing relevant education programs for country children?"*

Such problems were also identified in the Report on Education of Isolated Children by the Standing Committee on Education and the Arts (1976):

> *"Teachers in small schools encounter problems in widening students' outlook as a result of the children's limited personal experience and lack of breadth of external stimulation. Further, the restricted social and physical environments of children living in remote areas and their isolation from the facilities of urban life result in some difficulties for pupils in comprehending certain concepts which city children take for granted ".*

Secondly, the overall intention of 'positive discrimination' is in full accord with Schools Commission policy concerning the equality of educational opportunity which stems from the recommendations of the "Karmel Report (1973)".

> *" . . . the Committee feels strongly that there are certain areas which appear to have been neglected in the past and which deserve special emphasis . . . The deficiencies are not spread evenly among all schools and school systems. Differences in deficiencies require differences in treatment. Accordingly the Committee is recommending larger grants for some schools and some school systems ".*

Finally, both the intentions and the actualities of the Roctapus program need to be seen in the wider context of the rural environment and the characteristics of country schools. The principal problems, typical of the Priority Country Areas, are summarised below:

The nature of the area and of the community

- general low socio-economic levels
- social isolation of the area
- restricted range of local employment opportunities
- declining population
- limited cultural and other amenities
- continuous loss of talent to more populous areas

School characteristics

- low retention rates
- high teacher turnover
- limited curriculum choice
- young and inexperienced teachers
- a high percentage of schools listed as disadvantaged
- lower attainment levels on standardised tests
- limited vocational aspirations of students

For a comprehensive account of the problems of rural Queensland, from an educational viewpoint, readers are referred to the relevant sections of "School Leavers: Choice and Opportunity" (1977), a research report in the Poverty and Education Series.

THE PRODUCTION OF ROCTAPUS PROGRAMS

To supplement the information included in this section the reader should refer to the Project Profile in Appendix 1; preferably, a selection of Roctapus tapes should also be viewed.

Roctapus is a closed-circuit television series distributed fortnightly to schools on video-cassettes which can be used to fit in with teachers' schedules, stored for use as resource material and used out of school hours by the community. Each program is thirty minutes long and composed of four or five segments.

The program uses a magazine format to cover a wide range of topics as indicated by its full title: "Really Outstanding Colour Television About Practically Unlimited Subjects". The following extract is taken from an article entitled "Birth of Roctapus" which appeared in *Quest* 26 (1978). It provides a useful description of the basis on which material is selected for the program.

> *"After making the decision to produce an initial series of programs in a magazine format which aimed at interesting students from Years 4 to 10, it was agreed that serious consideration should be given to two important criteria – the expressed needs of the students must be recognised; and care should be exercised, in constructing individual programs, to avoid developing a sense of predictability in the viewers. In addition to these criteria, two further requirements are applied to program segment selection. Firstly, will the segment expand viewers' knowledge of the local environment? And secondly, will the segment expand viewers' knowledge of the world outside the local environment, and can it be related to present levels of experience?*
>
> *The next step was to determine broad areas which could be used as categories for all story segments or to give direction to stories, so that appropriate weight could be given to each category in the planning stages of the total series. To this end, the following categories were selected: science, technology and development; man and his environment; social patterns and lifestyles; history, trade and economy; survival, careers, services and preparation for life; culture and entertainment; leisure; kids in action; communications; and specials and features.*
>
> *The apparent overlapping nature of many of these categories gives scope to the series. 'Kids in action', for instance, is seen as a vehicle through which most other categories can be covered, but it also assists in keeping close contact with the audience and adds an interest factor to the program.*
>
> *"Specials and features" are prepared when short segments cannot do justice to the topic selected but cannot be accommodated within the present program format, and they reflect general strong statements of need from the schools. Specials produced so far include:* Beginnings and Endings – *a program for distribution towards the end of the school year, which prepares students for the experience of beginning school, leaving school, leaving one school for another outside their environment and leaving school for the world of work;* Bees Hey etc. – *a complete presentation of the "Puppet People's 'Black Theatre' ' puppetry;* Putting it Together *and* On the Move – *two programs through which students can relive their personal experience of the visit by the Brisbane State High School orchestra to the south west priority country area schools; and detailed coverage of the Royal Silver Jubilee Exhibition Train and the El Dorado Colombian Gold exhibit."*

The utilisation of a ten category classification to maintain a balanced selection of story material should be noted. A member of the production team described the practical use of this classification in the following words:

> *"Last year at Program 5, and we did the same thing this year at Program 5, we went back and judged the stories we'd done in terms of the categories. It's hard to project forward sometimes, though we try to project forward at the beginning of each planning period, but stories determine themselves – when they can be done. Time is a factor, certain stories can only be done at certain times and if you're busy shooting those stories and that's all you've got, you've got to run them in the program. But we looked back at the pattern over the last five programs and our emphasis is as we'd planned it."*

A simple analysis of program content confirmed that a wide range of topics was covered during 1978, as shown in the following table:

Program Content – 1978

Topic	No. of Stories	Time Allocation
Animals	8	35' 17"
Careers	6	34' 06"
Festivals	3	3' 00"
Health and Safety	7	29' 29"
History	7	44' 48"
Hobbies	5	27' 36"
Industry	4	18' 58"
People	4	15' 44"
Places	4	21' 53"
School Activities	2	2' 00"
Science and Technology	9	38' 39"
Social Life and Customs	15	34' 20"
Sport	16	61' 36"
The Arts	9	31' 50"
Specials	9	167' 48"
Transport	5	14' 37"

Further evaluation of both the category classification system and program content would appear to be desirable for inclusion in a final report.

The magazine format of the program is considered to have distinct advantages by members of the production team. The following comments illustrate the point:

"With that wide age range you've got to have a range of stories with a range of age interest levels . . . the magazine-format suits that ideally. (Short stories – it's attention capacity). It isn't as though the material is subject relevant – you can't spoof the secondary kids into watching it because they're going to be examined on it. So it's just got to be sheer interest and that means the story's got to be quick and short with a fair bit of impact and action in it."

Members of the production team also see the Roctapus series as having significant differences from other television programs:

"The difference is that normal television starts with the basic assumption of urbanised kids; we start with the basic assumption of kids living in basically rural areas . . . "

"The program belongs to the P.C.A.P. kids ".

In the process of collecting material for Roctapus programs the team travels extensively throughout the Priority Country Areas, visiting over fifty schools during 1978, and makes extensive use of audience suggestions. This is illustrated by the following comments about program content from team members:

"About seventy-five per cent would come directly as suggestions from them; the other twenty-five per cent are most likely to be related to ideas that come from them."

"We depend on them almost entirely – particularly for local content."

Maintaining and developing a special relationship with P.C.A.P. schools is seen as an essential component of the Roctapus program. For this reason Roctapus has sponsored specific activities such as the "Roctapus Quiz" during 1978 and windsurfing lessons for school students at the Beardmore and Fairbairn dams during the 1979 May holidays:

"Instead of expecting the kids to come to us we're going to them with an activity such as the windsurfing thing ".

The two co-producers are both qualified teachers, with many years experience in remote schools. The remainder of the team consists of a compere and support personnel with professional expertise in the fields of television, films and journalism. The high standard of program production achieved by the team was recognised at national level in November 1978 when Roctapus received a commendation at the annual Penguin Awards arranged by the Television Society of Australia.

Finally, in providing an educational television program specifically designed to meet the needs of rural schools, the Roctapus program could be seen as one attempt to answer a fundamental question posed by the Joint Committee in the P.C.A.P. Annual Report for 1977:

"How can educational services and resources be best provided to country children?"

ROCTAPUS IN THE SCHOOLS

This section of the report deals with the perceptions of various groups of people about reactions to Roctapus, its value and how it is used in the schools.

Collective Perspective – Teachers

Information concerning the views of teachers was obtained in the following ways:

1. By examining the replies to two questionnaire surveys conducted by the Roctapus team during 1978. Copies of these questionnaires appear in Appendix III.
2. From a telephone survey, conducted in May 1979, of schools that did not respond to either of the above surveys.
3. From a series of interviews and discussions with principals and teachers currently working in Priority Country Area schools, or who worked in Priority Country Area schools during 1978.
4. From letters written to the Roctapus team by teachers working in P.C.A.P. schools.

The response rate to the first Roctapus survey was 53% and to the second 35%. The telephone survey sampled head teacher opinion in nine schools which had not previously responded. Overall, some fifty-six schools (81% of the total number) were contacted. The high level of internal agreement between the survey results and with teacher opinion expressed during interview and discussion, and in letters, suggests that the findings described in this section of the report may be regarded as reasonably reliable. Because the picture in primary schools is different from that in secondary schools the findings will be reported separately.

In about three-quarters of the primary schools Roctapus programs were viewed by all Years ; in the remaining quarter viewing by the lower grades (Year 3 and below) was selective. In almost all cases (over 90%) the viewing took place during normal classroom lessons, although the actual time slot was usually left to the discretion of the individual teacher. In a significant number (about 30%), voluntary lunchtime viewing also occurred. Teacher opinion on the suitability of program content was overwhelmingly positive:

"Fills gaps due to isolation ".
"Opens their eyes ".
"Broadens horizons ".
"Please don't change. You have produced a program that for me and my group is just right ".

There were, of course, exceptions as shown by the following isolated comment:

"Overall, poor segments outnumber segments of educational use ".

Suggestions for improvement of content included:

- more local content;
- more for junior grades;
- more on service, people helping others;
- segments on particular industries (e.g. sugar)
- fewer pop groups.

The earlier survey produced some criticism of both the overall length of program and the length of individual segments. As a result of adjustments made to the program in the light of these comments, such criticisms were absent from later surveys.

Concerning pupil reactions, these were also seen as overwhelmingly positive by the majority of primary teachers:

"They come and tell me what they saw today."
"They enjoy it – see things they don't see out here."
"They all enjoy it."

Very few negative reactions were reported, typical comments being:

"Haven't had any."
"None come to mind."

Amongst the few reported were:

"Juniors find it hard to follow."
"A few were bored now and then."

Although the major use of Roctapus in primary schools is as a viewing experience, in over 70% it is also integrated with school work. This is mainly achieved through oral work and discussion, but it is also used as a stimulus for creative writing, art and social science projects. As one principal commented:

"It not only gives the kids ideas, but also the staff".

Nevertheless, during interview there was some criticism from principals about what they saw as the failure of classroom teachers to exploit the full potential of the program. As with many educational resources quality of use appears to be closely related to the quality of teaching.

In about half the primary schools the program is viewed by parents and citizens and other community groups. Again, reactions were seen as overwhelmingly positive, although in one instance the parents felt that the program was not highly educational.

All eight of the primary principals contacted by telephone were agreed as to the worthwhileness of the program. Their comments included:

"For this particular school, an excellent program."
"Not of vital importance, but very worthwhile."
"Wouldn't like to see it stopped – very suitable for country kids."
"I think its very good for the general broadening of their outlook – one of our big problems is insulation from the outside."
"A look at their own community through the eyes of other people – helps them appreciate some of the good things in country life."

Finally, a selection of letters written by primary teachers to the Roctapus team is included in Appendix IV.

Turning to secondary schools (including secondary departments), a somewhat different picture emerges. In only one-quarter of the schools were Roctapus programs regularly viewed by all students in Years 8, 9 and 10. In about half the schools opportunities were provided for interested students to view the program during the lunch-hour and student demand necessitated several performances. Viewing during lesson time was generally selective and left to the discretion of subject teachers. During wet weather the program was frequently viewed by sport and physical education classes.

Teachers, generally, considered that program content was interesting, but difficult to use because it was not subject-oriented. Suggestions for improvement included:

- segments on all aspects of government;
- more on careers;
- more emphasis on subject/syllabus orientation.

Student reaction to the program was seen as extremely positive by the majority of secondary teachers, with one principal attributing negative reactions to:

"Only those kids who would be bored anyhow ".

Integration of Roctapus with school subjects was limited, but occurred most frequently in Citizenship Education and English classes.

Overall, many high school teachers do not see the Roctapus program as being of particular value in their schools. This viewpoint is well expressed in the letter from a high school principal included in Appendix V. Although the views of teachers in secondary departments varied widely, they were generally much more favourable, as illustrated by the letter included in Appendix VI.

Collective Perspective — Students

Teacher perceptions of student reactions to Roctapus have been described in the previous section. Further information about student opinion was obtained through group discussions with over one-hundred students, in one primary school, one primary/secondary school and one high school, and from letters written by students to the Roctapus team.

It was apparent that for the vast majority of students participating in the group discussions the Roctapus program had proved interesting and enjoyable, suggesting that teacher perceptions reported earlier were correct. Most students appeared to enjoy Roctaround and wanted more stories of that type about people and places they knew. Boys, generally, demanded more sport and action stories, while the girls requested more animal stories.

Visits by the Roctapus Team had obviously been very much appreciated and students clearly related to team members at a personal level, particularly in the case of the compere. Student enthusiasm for the program is reflected in the dozens of letters on the Roctapus files, from which the following typical comments were selected:

"There is not one program I did not like." (St Patricks, Emerald)
"I am writing to tell you how much I like your show." (Rolleston State School)
"I have seen eleven of your programs and have enjoyed them." (Capella State School)
"I have watched many of your shows throughout the year and so far I reckon they are very good . . . Keep up the good work." (St Mary's, Charleville)

A typical selection of student letters is provided in Appendix VII.

One criticism that emerged was the disappointment of some students when, after a visit from the team, their own school received relatively short coverage in the finished program.

Collective Perspective — Administrators

Full length interviews were conducted with two administrators and a brief discussion was held with a third. It became apparent that the views of administrators corresponded closely with the views of teachers as previously reported. One value of Roctapus, not previously mentioned, was stressed by one of the administrators:

> *"It does serve to make known throughout the south-west happenings and events and things of local and social and cultural importance that happen in one centre and by means of Roctapus are transmitted to other centres . . . it's a pretty important function . . . it's making the south-west known to the south-west ".*

Commenting on the usefulness of Roctapus as a teaching resource another of the administrators offered the following remarks:

> *"These children, many of them, don't have T.V. anyway and receive very limited input of stimuli so the Roctapus tapes are used by some schools as a stimulus for oral communication, creative writing . . .".*

The overall use of Roctapus in his area was summed up by one administrator in the following words:

> *"At the moment it is used as an entertainment vehicle; it is used as a means of transmitting the sub-culture throughout the area it is intended to serve and it is utilised to a meaningful extent as a resource for teaching across a number of subject-matter areas ".*

ROCTAPUS ON TRIAL

In this section of the report a legal approach is used to draw attention to some of the strengths and weaknesses of the Roctapus program. The Advocate's Statement attempts to summarise the most positive claims that might reasonably be made, whereas the Adversary's Statement attempts to summarise the most damaging charges. Neither statement is intended to represent the evaluator's judgement of the program.

Advocate's Statement

Teachers, students and the Television Society of Australia all appear to agree that Roctapus lives up to its full title — Really Outstanding Colour Television About Practically Unlimited Subjects. As the name implies, its tentacles reach into all corners of the Priority Country Areas, providing a service for some 12 000 students in over 80 schools at a cost of less than $13 per student per annum. It is a major P.C.A.P. initiative which directly addresses a number of the principal concerns identified by the Joint Committee and makes a significant contribution to the 'unwritten curriculum' in country schools.

Students clearly find the programs interesting and enjoyable and their content is approved by the vast majority of teachers and parents. So enthusiastic are students about the program that they queue at lunchtimes to view it and bombard the Roctapus Team with a constant barrage of compliments and requests.

In addition to providing rural children with a window on the world, the program is also highly valued as a multi-purpose teaching resource. This teacher appreciation of the Roctapus series is demonstrated by their extensive use of the program for class viewing, particularly in the more remote areas where it is used in small schools as a corporate viewing experience. More importantly, the majority of teachers are agreed as to the worthwhileness of the program and wish to see it continued.

The magazine format is admirably suited to the quick-fire, stimulating and varied approach necessary to capture the attention of student audiences and the provision of the program on video-tapes, which can be retained by schools until the end of the year, allows maximum flexibility of use. The program is unique in being specifically aimed at children in the Priority Country Areas and plays an important role in transmitting the subculture of the region. For many children it is their only experience of television.

Community interest in Roctapus is demonstrated by the number of schools in which the program is regularly reviewed by Parent and Citizen Associations and community reactions to the program are perceived as overwhelmingly favourable.

Looking to the future, the distribution of the program could be extended to a larger number of schools at little more expense than the cost of additional tapes.

In the language of consumer associations, Roctapus is arguably a 'Best Buy'; it is certainly 'Good Value for Money'.

Adversary's Statement

Including initial capital outlay, the total cost of the Roctapus project to date is in the region of $480 000 making it by far the most expensive of all the P.C.A.P. initiatives. Even the recurrent annual cost of producing the program is as much as the combined annual cost of the P.C.A.P. primary and secondary itinerant teacher services. At a time when there is increasing concern about the effect of too much T.V. viewing by children, many people might see this level of expenditure on yet another program as open to question.

Many high school teachers consider that the program's magazine format and lack of subject orientation reduce its value in the secondary situation, whilst the unpredictable nature of the content has sometimes presented problems to primary teachers wishing to plan integrated classroom activities.

Although the interest and entertainment value of the program can hardly be questioned, the comments of several principals suggest that its actual impact in terms of integrated classroom work is sometimes disappointing. Furthermore, the educational value of some program segments, such as those featuring 'pop' groups, is open to challenge, although a more damning criticism could be the failure of the program to involve teenage viewers in issues of serious social import. Finally, on the topic of program content, the relatively limited coverage of 'the arts' in a series intended for use in a culturally deprived area is, perhaps, surprising.

A major problem influencing program effectiveness is that of the lack of congruence between intended and actual audiences. Although the series is aimed at the 10 to 16 years age group, survey findings suggest that programs are more commonly used with lower primary than lower secondary grades. This lack of congruence has implications for program design that have yet to be resolved.

Lastly, although further copies of the program can be produced at little more expense than the cost of additional tapes, problems could be expected in maintaining the personalised approach and regional flavour if the area of distribution is greatly extended.

Summing Up

Although the overall cost of Roctapus is not low, on a per capita basis it is one of the less expensive P.C.A.P. projects. Furthermore, a high proportion of expenditure to date has been of a capital nature and recurrent costs can be expected to run at a lower level. Thus, based upon 1978 figures, the annual cost of producing and distributing eighteen Roctapus programs is estimated at $125 000. This figure does not include the salaries of the two teachers who lead the production team or any allowance for the depreciation of capital equipment.

The high level of acceptance achieved in primary schools and, to a lesser extent, in secondary departments, suggests that the program is achieving its intended purpose with the majority of its customers. Even in the high schools, which represent less than twenty per cent of the potential audience, it provides a valuable viewing experience for many students, despite the lower level of formal classroom use.

ISSUES

1. Any reduction in funding would restrict the quality and/or quantity of programs. Continued funding at the present level would facilitate the completion of an ongoing, more detailed evaluation study, with particular reference to program content and use of the program in different types of school.

2. A limited increase in the number of schools receiving Roctapus could be achieved at little more expense than the cost of the additional tapes. If however, the area receiving Roctapus is to be substantially enlarged and the present character of the program maintained, the increase in funding would also need to cover the cost of trialling solutions to the problem of retaining a personalised approach with a more extensive audience.

3. Launching the Roctapus project has involved a capital outlay in the region of $290 000 (for production equipment and equipment for schools), whilst recurrent production costs are estimated at some fifty per cent of this figure. In any consideration of the future of Roctapus it would be important to retain the distinction between initial and recurrent expenditure.

4. Although well-received in the Primary schools, Roctapus appears to be regarded by a number of teachers as having less relevance in the secondary situation; by some this has been attributed to the magazine format and lack of subject orientation. The mismatch identified between intended and actual audiences is presumably an associated problem. Both problems may have to be resolved between the Roctapus Team and the P.C.A.P. schools and merit further investigation.

APPENDIX I – PROJECT PROFILE

PRIORITY COUNTRY AREA PROGRAM EVALUATION SERIES

May 1979

PROJECT PROFILE No. 3

Project Title:	Country Video Scheme/Roctapus
Location:	South-West and Central Priority Country Areas
Contact:	Mr J. Kitt, Co-ordinator, Radio and TV Services, Film Centre, Nathan Avenue, Ashgrove, Q. 4060. Telephone 38 5921
Budget:	1979/80 $165 000
Type of Project:	Piloting a service to provide country schools with specially produced Video TV programs.
Personnel:	2 registered teachers, 1 journalist, 1 cameraman, 1 editor, 1 sound recordist, 1 production assistant, 1 hostess/compere (part-time)

DESCRIPTION

Purpose:

- To provide schools in Priority Country Areas with specially produced Video T.V. programs containing segments of immediate interest to country children.
- To widen the horizons of children who through isolation are limited in the kind of contact available to children in larger centres.
- To design and produce programs of interest to a range of age levels in such a way that teachers can structure educational activities around particular segments.

Background:

- Roctapus programs are supplied to over 80 schools in the P.C.A.P. areas and have a potential audience of some 12 000 students.
- As a part of the project all schools in the Priority Areas outside of normal TV transmission have been supplied with Video-Cassette Recorders and Monitors. A maintenance service separately funded by P.C.A.P., keeps such equipment and other A-V equipment in schools in working order.
- In addition to Roctapus, schools not previously receiving A.B.C. educational programs are now receiving such programs through the State funded Remote Schools Video Program.
- Capital cost of establishing the project was approximately $290 000. This amount included an expenditure of $127 000 on production equipment and $163 000 on equipment for schools. The production equipment is also used to provide a range of other T.V. programs for schools.
- Roctapus was first screened in schools in March 1978 and during that year 16 episodes were produced at the Education Department's Film Centre, Ashgrove.
- The budget figure shown above does not include teachers' salaries.

Operations:

- Roctapus is a closed-circuit television program covering a wide range of magazine-style topics, as indicated by its full title: "Really Outstanding Colour Television About Practically Unlimited Subjects".
- Individual programs, usually of about 30 mins duration, are composed of a number of segments averaging some 4 to 6 minutes in length, linked by a compere.
- The program deals with the "unwritten curriculum"; that area of student activity outside the normal range of school subjects. Ten content categories are used to maintain an appropriate balance of story segments.
- The program is aimed at the 10 to 16 years age group, ranging from middle primary to lower secondary grades. Occasional "specials" are provided for children outside this age range and a series entitled 'Here I Am' for lower primary children is currently being produced.
- Stories in Roctapus programs are based on ideas suggested by the schools and communities that form the Roctapus audience. Considerable emphasis is placed upon maintaining two-way communication between the Roctapus team and this audience.
- The program is distributed fortnightly on video cassettes which may be retained by schools until the end of the year, thus allowing maximum flexibility of use. Eighteen programs are planned for 1979.
- Individual episodes from previous series may be borrowed from the Film Centre. A program cataloguing details of each story has been supplied to P.C.A.P. schools.
- For Teachers the program offers enrichment-type resource material; for Communities it is a source of information about people, places and events, not otherwise readily available.
- In November 1978 Roctapus received a Commendation at the annual Penguin Awards arranged by the Television Society of Australia.

Evaluation:

- An evaluation study has been undertaken which forms the basis of the comments below.

Comments:

- The reaction of students to Roctapus appears to have been almost entirely favourable and the vast majority appear to find the program both interesting and enjoyable.
- The reaction of teachers has also been extremely positive, with very few exceptions, although more so in primary than secondary schools. The emphasis on subject based curriculum in the latter schools may help explain this difference.

APPENDIX II – THE PURPOSE OF ROCTAPUS: A STATEMENT PREPARED BY MEMBERS OF THE PRODUCTION TEAM

THE PROBLEM

A number of studies including the report on the *Education of Isolated Children* of the Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts 1976 and the Fifth Main Report of the Poverty Commission – *Poverty in Education* indicate that children living in rural environment suffer from a number of disadvantages when compared with their urban counterparts. Significant amongst these is the lack of variety of experience and opportunities available to them.

THE RELEVANCE OF TELEVISION

As distance precludes travel to larger centres, an alternative is to use television to bring these children into contact with people, events, places and ideas that would otherwise be denied to them. Such a television program should be concerned not only with putting its audience in touch with the "Wider World", but in supporting the rural culture and lifestyle. Thus it should extend the rural child's awareness of his own environment. It should also serve to put rural children in touch with what is happening in each other's schools and in urban schools.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PROPOSED PROGRAM

i) To broaden students' outlooks on their own environment as well as developing their knowledge of other areas
ii) to provide enrichment, by extending children beyond their formal courses
iii) to encourage the development of creative arts and cultural activities
iv) to provide a balance of material relating to rural and urban communities
v) to involve students and local communities in the production and evaluation of programs.

FORMAT

A fortnightly magazine program consisting of short, varied stories would provide for a wide age-range appeal and would enable coverage of a variety of subjects.

AGE RANGE

Ten to sixteen years. This age group encompasses the bulk of the school population. It also embraces a community of interests, from the 10 year old who is looking forward to the freedoms and independence of adolescence to the adolescent able to act and take initiatives in those areas that appeal to him.

UNWRITTEN CURRICULUM

Good professional practice extends the teacher's immediate concern with the formal curriculum to the social, cultural and physical environment of the child. This is the underlying principle of the proposed program. To remain relevant, the program must provide for the special needs of the rural child. Equally, teachers must perceive the educational needs arising from the rural environment to understand the role of the program and give it an effective place in the school's formal timetable.

PROGRAM MATERIAL SOURCES

In view of the above, ideas for the program should come from the students, teachers and communities in the P.C.A.P. areas and represent their needs and interests. Surveys and regular face to face discussions will be necessary to effect this. Regular involvement of the audience in program making will also be a measure of the success of this aspect.

SUBJECT CATEGORIES

The program would select story segments from these categories:

1. Kids in action
2. Culture and entertainment
3. Survival, careers, services, preparation for life
4. Man and his environment
5. Social patterns and life styles
6. Leisure
7. Communication
8. Science, technology and development
9. History
10. Trade and economy.

A number of these are overlapping. However, in all emphasis is given to participation by the audience age group. Using these categories ensures that the material presented is balanced throughout the series.

AS A SCHOOL RESOURCE

Being broadly educational in its intention, the program will provide incidental teaching resource material for teachers. It is not intended to be curriculum specific. Hopefully communities will find inspiration in recreational and extra curricular activities covered in the program, leading perhaps to community projects.

DEVELOPING OBJECTIVES

Increasingly, ROCTAPUS is being seen as more than just pictures on a screen. Audience involvement in story making, community activities sponsored by ROCTAPUS and regular visits by compere and film crew have made the program an experience its audience can share as well as something informative and entertaining to view.

APPENDIX III – QUESTIONNAIRES

ATTENTION: THE PRINCIPAL

SURVEY

Name of School: _____

Total Enrolment: _____

Is program viewed by all classes in the School? YES / NO

If No, why? _____

_____

During which periods is the program viewed?

PRIMARY
- General Lesson Periods
- Lunch
- Other_____

SECONDARY
- General Lesson Periods
- Pastoral Care
- Lunch
- Other_____

Comments of Teachers

Positive: _____

_____

Negative: _____

_____

Comments from Parents (if any)

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX III (CONT'D)

ATTENTION: Class Teachers (To be completed by individual teachers after viewing program with class)

Age range of children? _____

List of segments with most appeal _____

_____

_____

List segments with least appeal _____

_____

_____

Describe any activities/projects undertook as a result of watching the program

_____

_____

_____

List students' work or activities which could provide material for use in programs

_____

_____

_____

_____

Any further comments

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX III (CONT'D)

ROCTAPUS SURVEY FORM

Name of School:

Enrolment:

Number of Teachers on Staff:

Number of Teachers Leaving at the end of 1978:

PLEASE ADD ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS WHICH ARE NOT COVERED BY THE FOLLOWING HEADINGS

STORY CONTENT: (i.e. Suitability, suggested topics etc)

USAGE: (i.e. in which lesson used, regularity of viewing etc)

CHILDRENS REACTION TO PROGRAM: (positive / negative)

INTEGRATION WITH SCHOOL SUBJECTS:

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

APPENDIX IV – LETTERS FROM PRIMARY TEACHERS

State School _____

16th June 1978

Dear Roctapus Team,

I'd like to take this opportunity and thank you for your very excellent programme.

The children of isolated schools such as ours often tend to miss out on the nicer things which townspeople tend to take for granted.

The programme is enjoyed by the whole school and provides a very good incentive for hard work. It serves very well to broaden the children's outlooks and ideas and provides for many excellent discussions and researches about the "outside world".

I would like a tape of popular music if one has been prepared please.

Regards,

_____

Principal

State School _____

16–11–78

Dear Roctapus Team,

I've enclosed some work done by the children for "Here I Am".

You and your program are doing a really wonderful job. The children really enjoy your programs and look forward to them. They even watch them happily during their own time.

I'm transferred next year and will be outside the P.C.A.P. area. This disappoints me as I consider this an "advantaged" area now with all the good schemes in operation. If I had any comment to offer it would be that the P.C.A.P. and R.O.C.T.A.P.U.S. contribution within the area needs to be better understood by the inspectorate. They know about some facets but fail, I feel, to appreciate the depth and breadth of this special contribution to our schools. This isn't "sour grapes" but a genuine feeling felt in the area.

Thank you for your efforts for the children of the area. They appreciate it very much and really enjoy your work. I thank you personally for the real friendship of your team and hope to see you all again.

Yours faithfully,

APPENDIX IV (CONT'D)

State School _____

7th December 1978

Dear Marilyn,

I feel at this stage of the year, I should write to you in praise of "Roctapus". I believe the shows have been of great value in stimulating, motivating, and broadening the outlooks of the children of _____.

I feel that the type of story, the approach of the interviewers and the excellent "anchoring" of Jo Pearson, have been at an ideal level for the Upper Primary children here. The shows are eagerly awaited, especially as we have no T.V. reception. "Roctapus" has been used for Written Expression, Reading, and Research, but is really in many ways complete in itself in adding to the experiences of "disadvantaged children".

I do feel that the bulk of your audience could cope with longer and more "in depth" stories and that the music could be more varied. However, these are minor points.

I really do hope that "Roctapus" continues, although I suppose there are problems of cost/benefit and I have no knowledge of the cost/program and can make no judgement in that regard. However as a fairly conservative and hardened teacher, I can enthusiastically commend its value in schools like _____.

Yours faithfully,

_____

Principal

APPENDIX IV (CONT'D)

_____ Convent

8th December, 1978

Dear Roctapus,

This is just a short note to thank you sincerely for the varied interesting film clips you have supplied during the year. The children have thoroughly enjoyed each Roctapus, and also their general knowledge has been expanded.

Thank you once again, and we're all looking forward to seeing Roctapus next year.

Yours sincerely,

Sr _____

APPENDIX V – LETTER FROM A HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

In the High School all periods are tightly allocated to various subjects. I would not ask any teacher to give up valuable teaching time to watch a programme of general rather than specific interest. Neither do the teachers seem anxious to interrupt time to view with their classes.

We have considered lunch time viewing. However, as the programme frequency is fortnightly, this would mean in effect another teacher on duty every day at lunch time as the audience size is restricted to 40 approx.

Greater use is made of those A.B.C. school's broadcasts which are immediately of specific interest.

These are rather hard facts for me to write as they probably seem to indicate a lack of interest. I think it is rather a lack of need on our part since most students are able to view programmes of general interest in their own home.

An alternative channel for home viewing might be a far better proposition.

I am sorry to disappoint you, as the value and quality of the programme seems good. It is just that we don't see it as a priority. Perhaps you have some suggestions to make in the light of your total survey.

Principal

9/4/78

APPENDIX VI – LETTER FROM A SECONDARY DEPARTMENT TEACHER

_____ School

July 20, 1978

Dear Jo,

As a member of staff, I would like to say how much we in the secondary section really enjoy Roctapus. It opens whole new horizons for many of the students and gives them an idea of what is happening outside.

I am enclosing letters from the Grade 8 students giving you their views on Roctapus.

Best of luck to you and the team.

Yours sincerely,

_____

APPENDIX VII – LETTERS FROM PUPILS

(I really DIG the program.)
Dear Jo,

Hi! I am writing to tell you how much I enjoy the Roctapus programs I have really enjoyed all the tapes but particularly liked the Injune Rodeo as I am interested in horses and campdrafting. I live on a cattle property fifty-eight miles west of Clermont .

The Roctapus Quiz was a very good idea and I really enjoyed it. The bike riding was good but I am not very interested in bikes. I would also like to see Slim Dusty singing or an interview with him. I would love you to film the Twin Hills Rodeo in the August holidays (I might be riding in the campdraft). Bert Hinkler was good because we have been learning about him in Social Studies. We will be camping in a caravan at the Rodeo. So hopefully we might see you.

Thanks once again.

Love

Would the crew please sing a song.

P.S.(I really like your cat, Webster.)

Dear Jo,

We watch Roctapus here and we all enjoy it. I haven't really got any favourite part because they're all so interesting. I hope you will come to Emerald one day and see us. I hope Webster is feeling better. I would like to see something about the life of some circus people. Here is a limerick about Stan –

There was a young man called Stan
Whose work was a camera man
With his camera and flash
He made all his cash
That wealthy young man called Stan.

Yours faithfully,

APPENDIX VII (CONT'D)

Dear Jo,

How are you? The shows that have been on have been very interesting.

The programme I liked best was number five especially Fun, Fun, Fun. I would like to see more Country Music too.

I have been enjoying the tapes very much.

The Roctapus Quiz was very interesting.

Thank you for everything you have done towards Roctapus. God Bless You.

Bye

_____

Dear Jo,

I like your programmes very much, but I was very disappointed about the programme with the schools on it. Alpha convent was shown for about fifteen seconds. All the same they are all very interesting. I would like to see something on a circus practising for a show. A lot of my friends would like to see something on the Brisbane Exhibition.

Yours sincerely,

_____

P.S. I would like to see something on a ghost town.

REFERENCES

1. Australian Schools Commission, Interim Committee, "Schools in Australia", Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service, 1973.

2. Australian Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts – Report on Isolated School Children, 1976.

3. Australian Government Commission of Enquiry into Poverty – Poverty and Education Series, "School Leavers: Choice and Opportunity", Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service, 1977.

4. "Karmel Report" – See Australian Schools Commission above.

5. Kitt, J. "Birth of Roctapus", Quest 26, Information and Publications Branch, Department of Education, Queensland, 1978.